

A Witnessing Community *Community*



Thrust Statement: The Church is to witness to God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus.

Scripture Reading: [Matthew 28:18-20](#); [John 4:39](#); [Acts 8:14](#)

As one reflects upon the Great Commission, one cannot help but think about the importance of witnessing to the world at large, the magnitude of ethical behavior in one's outreach to the lost, and the place of baptism in this scheme of redemption from heaven. This paper will develop this subject of the witnessing community from these three perspectives. The company of the Resurrection needs to recapture the Great Commission as first and foremost in its agenda to reach the lost. Jesus' words to His disciples concerning the Great Commission receive little attention from many within the company of the redeemed.

The modern Church is composed of a silent people. Yet, many Christians emphasize Christian baptism in isolation from its whole context—"go and make disciples of all nations" ([Matthew 28:19](#)). It appears, so it seems to this author, that witnessing is secondary in the lives of many Christians. When one becomes a part of the company of Resurrection, this person becomes a member of the Christian community that is a witnessing Christianity. Just a casual glance at the Book of Acts reveals the witnessing community as a community that proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus wherever they traveled.

THE WITNESSING COMMUNITY

Christians must recapture the seriousness of the Macedonian Call, so to speak, to evangelize the world. Christians should be ready to proclaim Jesus as the Way to God. The Church of Jesus is always a missionary Church, at least it should be; it must be a Church with an outreach ministry—local and abroad. Is there a desire on your part to win others to Christ? Do you want others to be the same as yourself in your belief that Jesus is the Anointed One of God for the salvation of humanity? Are you willing to proclaim the Christian worldview? Are you willing to undergo hardness and discipline in your Christian walk? Are you zealous for the things of God? Do you feel constrained to live and even to

die for Jesus?

Are you a missionary? The Church of Jesus is always a missionary church. One of the greatest missionaries in the early church was Paul. He put God first in all his thinking and actions. Even when he stood before King Agrippa, he sought to reach out to Agrippa and Festus (**Acts 26**). During Paul's defense for His faith in Jesus, Festus interrupted his speech and accused Paul of being out of his mind (**26:24**). After this interruption, Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" ^[1] Paul's reply to Agrippa is outstanding: "I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains" (**26:29**). One cannot read these words of Paul without a consciousness that Paul was a man of conviction. Are you a person of conviction? This speech of Paul is a speech of a man who is a man who has strong beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth. Are you, too, a crusader for the Gospel of Jesus?

Andrew's Example of Evangelism

As a crusader, one must tell the Good News to individuals that he or she makes contact with. What about relatives? What about close friends? John the apostle relates the ministry of John the Baptist along with his testimony about Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (**John 1: 35**). One of the men who heard John's testimony about Jesus followed Jesus. Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew was so excited concerning Jesus that he went and found his brother Peter in order to tell him about the Messiah and to bring him to Jesus (**1:36-42**). Listen to John as he relates this incidence:

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. ^[2] Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. (**1:40-42**).

Are you like Andrew? Is there an excitement in your life to tell others about Jesus and bring them to Him? If one is under deep conviction about Jesus as the Savior of the world, one cannot help but lead people to Jesus.

Philip's Example of Evangelism

The day after Andrew witnessed to his brother Peter, Jesus found Philip (**1:43**). Philip, like Andrew, found Nathanael and told him about Jesus the Messiah (**1:45**). Every believer is an evangelist. The Book of Acts is a book about Christians sharing Jesus. Is your faith in Jesus real? If so, then you cannot keep this precious faith to yourself. Christians cannot live in isolation from the society in which they live. If one keeps his or her faith to himself or herself, one's religion is not true religion, but religiosity. One cannot just share his or her faith with a certain race—carefully selected people of his or her own class or culture—but the Gospel must be shared with all races. John the apostle

writes: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (**Revelation 7:9**).

The Church’s message for the world is the Gospel of Jesus. The Christian community is ordained of God to fulfill God’s plan—redemption in and through Jesus. There is one single Gospel for the company of the Resurrection—Jesus. Jesus is the Evangel Himself. The Gospel has to do with events surrounding His birth, His death, and His Resurrection. Preaching the Cross of Jesus is crucial to Christianity. As one peruses the whole Bible, one discovers that the key to all Scripture is Jesus. In the first century, the driving force of Christian mission focused on the proclamation of the mighty acts of God in redemption. If one’s missionary outreach is to be biblical and effective, it must be Christo-centric. The preaching of the written Word is to lead the world to the Word made flesh (**John 1:14**).

It is through the sharing of the Good News of God that the work of Christ goes out. If God is to be glorified, the Gospel must be announced. Thus, as stated above, a living Church is always a missionary Church—a Church that proclaims Jesus as God’s only Way of salvation. One must “go” and “tell.” The early followers of Jesus had such a rich and deep faith that they carried “the faith” to others. They witnessed, as it were, together, and the Lord added to their number daily (**Acts 2:41**). The Church has come into being through God’s gift of Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity. It is through the Church, since Pentecost, that the message of the redeeming work of Jesus is proclaimed to the world. The Christian fellowship proclaims the true Way of Life (**John 14:6**).

Is your faith real? Is your faith so precious that you cannot keep it to yourself? For one to refuse to share his or her faith, one is guilty of religious individualism, which is a contradiction of the message of Christ. When one cherishes the Christian faith, one can no longer just treasure this in his or her bosom or keep to oneself. Do you comprehend the Good News? If so, then you recognize that the Gospel is God’s Good News for all sorts and conditions of men and women. When one truly realizes the true nature of God’s Way of salvation, one can only cry: “Woe is me if I do not preach it.” If one knows the true meaning of the word *Gospel*, one cannot remain silent about his or her faith in Jesus as the Way of Salvation. Is your faith real? Is your faith worth sharing? Can one keep “the faith” to himself or herself? Many Christians have left the central mission of the Church—go and make disciples.

Zeal for the Things of God

Is your faith on fire? Are you burning with zeal for the things of God? Listen to Paul as he admonishes Christians in Rome about their enthusiasm: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (**Romans 12:11**). Do you have the zeal of Andrew, Philip, and Paul? Even though redemption has been won, nevertheless, Christians still live on the frontlines. In the Cross of Christ, one discovers that everything necessary for forgiveness has been accomplished in and through the finished work of Christ. In this New Humanity, believers are set free to a new life to do good works in order to bring honor to God. God’s children do good, not as a condition of forgiveness, but rather in gratitude for forgiveness. God demands allegiance from His people. God’s love is so rich that He prepared reconciliation for sinful men and women even before humanity entered the struggle against Him (**Ephesians 1:4**). Are you a part of the witnessing

community of the Messiah?

Are you sluggish in your walk with God? Are you lukewarm or are you hot for God's Gospel? Are you aflame for the Good News of God? Do you live in a state of don't-care-ism? The Lord Jesus addresses one of the seven churches of Asia with these words of warning: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!"¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (**Revelation 3:15-16**). What does the Gospel mean to you? The Gospel is about One who came to rescue sinful humanity from sin (**Galatians 1:4**). This redemption is the Good News about salvation. The Gospel is not opinions about the interpretation of certain Scriptures. The Gospel is not about five acts of worship performed on Sunday morning. No, the Gospel is about Jesus. Jesus came preaching the Gospel, but, at the same time, He is the Gospel.

Mark reports the words of Jesus to the Apostles about the proclamation of Himself as the Gospel of God: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (**Mark 16:15**). Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus. In the Galatian Epistle, Paul writes: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."^b⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**Galatians 3:8-9**). Over two thousand years before God became flesh, He revealed to Abraham (2166 BC) the Gospel. The Gospel of God is Good News that He has devised a Way of salvation through faith, not works—"justify the Gentiles by faith." Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus of Nazareth: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"^a meaning one person, who is Christ (**3:16**).

The Gospel is news about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, not notions advanced by certain religious groups. The Gospel preached to Abraham, two thousand years before the coming of the Messiah, was not about kitchens in the church building, the manner of distributing the bread in the Lord's Supper (pinch or break), the drink element in the Lord's Supper (wine or grape juice), the manner of singing (accapella or instrumental), and so on. The Gospel is about God's method of salvation—"justified by faith" (**2:16**). The message that Jesus told His disciples to proclaim, shortly before His ascension cannot be tampered with. The message of salvation is about Jesus: "But when God, who set me apart from birth^a and called me by his grace, was pleased¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles (**1:15**).

Paul preached Jesus. Jesus is the "faith" that Paul preached. Again, listen to Paul as he captures the very essence of the Gospel that he proclaimed in the province of Galatia: "I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ."²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (**1:22-23**). "Preaching the faith" is equivalent to preaching the Gospel. Preaching the Gospel is equivalent to preaching Jesus. Some wanted to add to the Gospel, but the apostle objected strenuously about the merging of Law and Gospel as conditions of salvation:

We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners'¹⁶ know that a man is not

justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (2:15-16).

Paul defines the Gospel in the first part of this Epistle: “who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (1:4). Is it any wonder that Paul warns the Galatians about holding to this truth—Jesus gave Himself for our sins. Listen once more to Paul as he calls a curse down upon anyone, even angels, who preach another way of salvation other than by faith in Him:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (1:6-9)!

The Church is a witnessing community of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the redemption of both men and women. Christians should never confuse what is essential (the Gospel) with the non-essentials. What is taught in many congregations is largely unintelligible to the world at large. Even though tradition has its value, nevertheless, it must never be equated with the Word of God itself. In spite of differences within the witnessing community, the Church should be prepared to listen with patience to other Christians whose views arouse one’s antagonism in order to reach them for Christ.

The witnessing community of Christ needs to recapture Jesus’ instructions in the Great Commission as reported by Mark: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). Justification by faith alone is the very heart and the very substance of the Christian Gospel. Salvation is the initiative of God’s love. The witnessing Church is the bearer of the Gospel of God’s forgiveness and is the home of the new fellowship of love, a love that has its origin in God. Once more, in this Galatian Epistle, Paul hammers home the point of the Gospel:

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”^{d 12} The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”^{e 13} Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”^{f 14} He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (3:11-14).

The message has concreteness, which is concerned with facts. Paul delivered what he had received. In Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, he writes with conciseness concerning the very heart of the Christian message, a message the Church is to proclaim:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^a: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**).

As one recalls the words of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**, one is confronted with the question: What is the whole calling of the Church? The answer is: It is to fulfill the mission entrusted to it by Christ. Earlier, Jesus, in His prayer to the Father, says, “**As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world**” (**John 17:18**). The ministry of the Church is related to the ministry of Christ. It is through the ministry of the Church that Christ is at work. It is in this vein that Paul reminds the Philippians: “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (**Philippians 2:12-13**). The Church is indispensable to the proclamation of God’s Gospel in a pagan society. Yet again, pay attention to Paul as he seeks to give details of the true nature of ministry among the redeemed:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 5:18—6:1**).

Are you an ambassador for the faith? Unless one is a representative for the faith, one is not holding to the faith. As a witnessing Church, the Church must, as Paul calls awareness to the Gospel to the Corinthians, witness to itself. In other words, the Christians community, as it were, must constantly remind itself of the Good News of God’s Way of salvation in and through Jesus since so many Christians are indifferent rather than excited for the kingdom of God. Jesus sets forth the Gospel in His conversation with Nicodemus: “**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,^f that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**” (**John 3:1 6**). That is the Gospel. This is the urgent task of revivals—call attention to the urgency of the Gospel of God. Paul, in his last letter to Timothy, encouraged him with the following words:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**).

All Christians need this reflection upon what Christianity is really all about. Not only must the Church witness to itself, but it must also witness to its children. Parents, as members of

the Christian community, have a responsibility to tell their children about God's interaction in history for the salvation of humanity. The witnessing community must hand on the Gospel it has received. This witnessing begins at home. By passing this scheme of redemption on to his or her children, an individual is passing on the Gospel to future generations. This call to the Christian faith begins in the home. God told Moses about religious education for the children:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^{a 5} Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**).

Witnessing to one's children is a means of fulfilling the Great Commission. As mothers and fathers, do you tell your children Bible stories? Unfortunately, many parents no longer share with their children the stories out of God's Word, and, sad to say, they themselves no longer know the Book. It is not uncommon for Christian parents to tell their children about Winnie the Pooh as well as many other fictional stories, but neglect to tell them stories about Abraham, Daniel, Joseph, Elijah, Naaman, and so on. The Church dies when the Bible is neglected and forgotten. Is the Word of God written upon your being? The words of Paul about Timothy's childhood is revealing:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (**2 Timothy 3:14-15**).

Is the Word of God in your blood, so to speak? Is it written upon your heart? Is it a part of your breathing? Is it a part of your way of life? Mothers and fathers must bring their children to Christ. One cannot delegate this responsibility to others, even though others may contribute to their spiritual understanding of spiritual things. It is not just mothers that participate in this training; it is also grandmothers. Once more, listen to Paul as he begins his second Epistle to Timothy as he recalls the background training of Timothy: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (**1:5**). The things revealed in the Bible are for those who are yet to be born. The Church must witness concerning Christ as well as God's history of redemption, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.² I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—³ what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.⁴ We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.⁵ He decreed statutes for

Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, ⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. ⁷ Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands (**Psalm 78:1-8**).

ETHICAL CONDUCT PREREQUISITE TO EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Not only are Christians to witness to themselves and to their children, but they must also witness to the world. But in witnessing to the world, every believer must look at himself or herself. In other words, Christians must examine themselves in order to not bring the Gospel of God under condemnation (**Matthew 28:20**). Is your life a life of light and salt? Are you walking in the lust of the flesh? Or are you walking in the Spirit? Are you an example to Christians as well as to non-Christians? Paul, in this regard, wrote to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**).

If Christians are going to “cut any ice,” so to speak, they must exemplify Christ in their day-to-day walk with Him. It is in this same vein that Paul reminds Timothy:

⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance ¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. ¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (**1 Timothy 4:9-12**).

The world is right in wanting a personal witness in one’s way of life. Without this witness, the witness concerning Christ as the Savior of the world will not fly. Unless the world sees Christ in the Christian community—each individual person—the world will yawn and turn away. Whenever unkindness is done, God’s will is not done. Since God is love, Christians need to illustrate love and godly behavior in their walk with Him (**Ephesians 4:17—5:21**). Are we unlovely? Are we ungodly? Are we diabolical? Are we resistant against God’s action to us in and through Jesus Christ? If the witnessing community understands God’s grace, this knowledge, in and of itself, will change one’s external behavior. This is why the Church still needs this testimony about God’s Gospel. Paul writes to Titus about grace and behavior:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled,

upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (**Titus 2:11-14**).

A renewal of Christianity in the world must begin among the followers of Christ. One way of renewal is through prayer. Prayer is one of the evidences of a living faith and, at the same time, an adequate confession of faith. One can say that Paganism begins where prayer ends. Men and women often practice what they don't preach—materialism. In a world of worldliness, the witnessing community often ignores Jesus' stern statement: “**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**” (**Matthew 6:33**). The deadliest enemy in the Christian Church today is practical atheism. The world is too much a part of the Body of Christ.

Christians need to reevaluate the world of short-term with the world of long-term—a citizenship in heaven. Paul tells the Philippians: “Our citizenship is in heaven” (**Philippians 3:20**). If the witnessing community is to be effective in its outreach to the lost, each member must refuse to live as an enemy of the Cross of Christ. Ethical conduct is prerequisite to effective evangelism:

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (**3:17-21**).

Prior to this admonition, Paul reminds the Philippians about bringing their lives into harmony with the Gospel of Christ:

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing,¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe¹⁶ as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing (**2:12-16**).

Again, Paul writes to the Colossians with urgency about proper behavior:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things

above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your^a life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.^b ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (**Colossians 3:1-10**).

Renewal of One's Inner Faith

If the Christian community is to effectively evangelize the world, it must recapture the sense of heavenly-mindedness—a life in God. Each member of the witnessing community must brand, as it were, the following words of the psalmist on his or her forehead: “Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his^a; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (**Psalms 100:3**). Since the family of God believes in God the Father almighty and His creation, the Church must stand still, as it were, and reflect upon the things of God. The words of **Psalms 46:10** rings loud and clear for the believer: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

If the Church is to discharge its responsibilities of proclaiming God's Salvation in and through Jesus, each member must continually renew and deepen his or her life in humble repentance and thankfulness for God's mercy and love (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**). The inner life of the Church depends upon religious devotion in the home. If there are no prayers in the home, the Church will not be as strong as it ought to be. If there are not private and diligent studies of God's Word, the Church will not be as fervent in zeal as it should be. One's failure to pray and study results in a Sunday gathering as weary, musty, lifeless, dull, and unprofitable. Attendance on Sunday morning is valuable for the people of God, but, at the same time, there must be daily activities in spiritual things. The words of the psalmist again drive home this point: “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (**Psalms 1:2**).

If one expects spiritual maturity in the Lord, one must study the Word of God on a regular basis. It is in this vein that Peter writes: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (**1 Peter 2:2**). If the believer is not concerned, from first to last, with the mighty acts of God in human history, he or she will not grow in their salvation. God's way with men and women is to lead them to repentance. Through faith and repentance, one is delivered from one's corrupt and paralyzing past so that one may serve Him in newness of life (**Romans 6:1-14**). The Gospel of God teaches not just an outward and temporal relationship to God, but rather an inward attitude of the righteousness of the heart. In order for there to be this kind of commitment, there must be a new outlook on life and a new way of living—living for God. For one to be a Christian, there must be a complete change of mind in one's priorities.

Since your conversion to Christ, are you still going around without ever having made an adult commitment to follow Christ? In Christ, there can be no growth until one makes a decision—a decision of dedication to serve Christ as Lord of one's life. Many Christians still live a barren, fruitless life in Christ. Is your will captive to Jesus or to Satan? Sin means that one's will is captive to his or her desires. In other words, one who is captive to his or her own desires is one who puts himself or herself as the center of the world. In conversion, there is a beginning, but no end. One never stops serving. Christians are to live radically changed lives. Are you devoted to God? One's dedication to God contributes to the total transfiguration of one's life, which life is lived in such a way that it works toward redemption of the world.

The very heart of the Christian faith is loyalty of God's will in one's life. In other words, in one's walk with God, there will be an utter self-abandonment to God. Has your life been made a tool for the living God? Has your life been made an instrument for the advancement of His will upon earth? Do you ever pray the words of Jesus: “**Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**” (**Matthew 6:10**)? One way of renewal is through prayer. Is your life a sacrifice for the kingdom of God (**Romans 12:1-2**)? Do you pray? Remember that prayer simply means that you come to seek God because you need Him. One can also say that prayer is one's response to God's revelation of Himself. Jesus prayed! Do you pray?

Within just a few hours of His death, He prayed in a place called Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:26-46**). On the Cross, He prayed **Psalms 22:1**—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (**Matthew 26:46**). It is at the Cross of Jesus that one sees what sin means. Since Christians believe and accept His forgiveness, they must go regularly to God in prayer. Do you ever want to give up? If so, then you should reread the words of Luke as he reports the words of Jesus in the Parable of the Persistent Widow (**Luke 18:2-8**). Luke introduces this parable with these words about prayer: “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (**18:1**). One reason for setting aside a certain time for prayer is that one may be at the disposal of God at all times. Are you praying for sensitivity to the voice of God in His Word?

Prayer is just one aspect of one's worship. Is your life a life of worship? Do you surrender your body to God as a living sacrifice, which is one's spiritual act of worship? What is worship? Worship is the response of the soul to the uncreated. Worship is always a reference to the Absolute and Eternal God. In worship, one responds to the impact of Eternity. Many Christians profess faith in God, but, on the other hand, their lives demonstrate that they hardly ever think of Him. Paul writes in this regard: “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (**Titus 1:16**).

Christians must die to self in order that they may live for God (**Romans 6:11-14**). Jesus demands not only one's mind, but He also demands allegiance of one's total being (**Matthew 22:34-40**). God's people are told: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (**Hebrews 10:25**). Sunday gatherings are important, but, at the same time, Christians should not go unfed for six days. Christians still need times of retreat with God during the week; otherwise, famine of the soul sets in. The words of Luke set the tone for spiritual renewal:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke

bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved ([Acts 2:46-47](#)).

BAPTISM IN THE GREAT COMMISSION

Baptism is also a witness of one's acceptance of the message of salvation by faith. Ten days after Jesus' remarks concerning the proclamation of the Gospel and the immersion of those who accepted the Good News of God's Way of salvation in and through Christ, one observes the Day of Pentecost in which three thousand were baptized. Luke reports: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" ([Acts 2:41](#)). Baptism is one of the means whereby each believer demonstrates to the Church that he or she accepts the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, God's Anointed One. Another example is found in Philip's preaching in Samaria. Luke writes: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" ([Acts 8:12](#)). If one believes the message of the Gospel, one submits to baptism. Baptism is one of the foremost ways of announcing your commitment to Jesus as Lord. Following their acceptance of the message by baptism, one reads: "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them" ([8:14](#)).

The conversion of Cornelius is also quite revealing ([Acts 10](#)). Cornelius sends for Peter, and, after his arrival, he informs Peter: "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" ([10:33](#)). In the course of Peter's words, Peter draws attention to Jesus as the Savior of the world. In his comments, he announces the means of forgiveness: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" ([10:36](#)). Again, Peter focuses in on the message of salvation: "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead" ([10:42](#)). How is forgiveness of sins received? Peter alludes to the Old Testament prophets for his answer: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" ([10:43](#)).

On this occasion, the Gentiles received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as did the apostles on the Day of Pentecost ([10:44-46](#)). Did they receive forgiveness of sins when they believed? Did this outpouring of the Holy Spirit fall on children of Satan or children of God? The Gentiles received this outpouring of the Holy Spirit prior to baptism. Upon seeing their acceptance of the message and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, Peter issued the command for baptism ([10:47-48](#)). Immediately, Luke writes: "The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God" ([11:1](#)). Sometime later, Peter explained God's acceptance of the Gentiles into the Christian community. In this explanation he says: "He purified their hearts by faith" ([15:9](#)). Luke also records Lydia's response to "Paul's message" by being baptized ([16:13-15](#)). Faith does not exclude baptism ([Mark 16:16](#)). Even though one becomes a child of God through faith ([Galatians 3:26](#)), nevertheless, baptism is the means whereby one is inducted into the Body of Christ ([3:27](#)), which operation is the operation of the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#)). When one becomes a part of the Christian community, one becomes a part of the new creation ([2 Corinthian 5:17](#)).

Once more, one can say that baptism was/is a visible sign that they had “received the word of God.” It is in a sense a public declaration of one’s acceptance of the Gospel of God. Baptism, so it seems to me, is a divinely appointed seal upon one’s faith. It is a seal upon that cleansing and forgiveness of sins, which God grants in response to faith (**Acts 10:43; 15:9**). Baptism is a way of publicly announcing one’s faith in Jesus. To illustrate this concept, one only needs to turn their attention to Abraham’s justification and God’s command for circumcision. Abraham’s circumcision was not the cause of his justification, but faith. Paul explains:

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (**Romans 4:9-12**).

Is one justified before or after baptism? Is not baptism also a sign or seal of the righteousness that God credits to the one who puts his or her trust in Jesus. Again, in the Galatian Epistle, Paul calls forth Abraham to demonstrate how a man or woman is put in a right relationship with God:

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”^a ⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”^b ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**Galatians 3:6-9**).

Out of one hundred and forty-five verses in Galatians (six chapters), Paul mentions baptism one time. The verses before baptism (**3:27**) address the subject of justification by faith, not baptism (**3:23-26**). In verse twenty-six, he writes: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” To assert that baptism precedes justification runs counter to the whole of apostolic teaching. Just a casual glance at **Romans 4:9-11** demonstrates emphatically that, in the case of Abraham, initiation through circumcision followed his justification by faith. Abraham’s faith was the condition precedent to his circumcision, not the other way around. If the issue of baptism had been as dominant as circumcision was among the Jews, Paul, no doubt, would have said that men and women receive baptism as a seal of the righteousness credited to them through faith. What is necessary to salvation is faith in God through Jesus Christ, which baptism is the sign.

On the other hand, if one rejects Christian baptism, one rejects the message of salvation. Baptism is, in a sense, an acknowledgement that God’s way of atonement for sins is right. Luke adds his comments to the words of Jesus concerning the baptism of John the Baptist and the religious leaders:

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words,

acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (**Luke 7:29-30**).

John the Baptist baptized those who repented, that is to say, he baptized those who took up a new attitude to God and to life, a life under God's control. One observes two things about John's baptism: (1) A solemn seal upon the public declaration of repentance, and (2) A solemn seal of their forgiveness as individuals waiting for the coming of the Messiah that John announced. The water-baptism by the disciples of Jesus probably meant what it did for John's disciples, a solemn seal upon the repentance of those who accepted their message of salvation in and through Jesus. Baptism admitted them into the ranks of those who were qualified for God's coming kingdom.

On another occasion, Jesus asked the religious leaders a question about John's baptism: "Tell me, ⁴ John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men (**20:3**)? Just as John's baptism was from heaven, so Christian baptism is from heaven, not from men. When one rejects Christian baptism, one rejects God's purpose for himself or herself. When one discards Christian baptism, one denies that God's Way of salvation is right. Baptism is one means whereby one acknowledges that God's Way of redemption is right. When one refuses Christian baptism, one rejects the Gospel of God, which is essentially a message concerning the gift of salvation by grace through faith in His Son. In baptism one can also say that faith goes beyond one's understanding and penetrates into the heart. In baptism, one shares in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. As one approaches the water of Christian baptism, one is struck with awe and impelled to bow in adoration for such matchless love.

Christians did not choose the symbol of water; God Himself chose water-baptism for His New Community, the fellowship of His Son Jesus. In baptism, one discerns, as it were, visible words of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 6:1-10**). Within baptism, one takes a look at the witness and the effectual sign of God's grace. During baptism, one sees the activity of God in the salvation of humanity. As one submits to baptism, one is reminded of what Christ accomplished for humanity—redemption from sins and restoration of the broken fellowship between God and humanity. Yes, baptism proclaims what God has done for lost sinners. Whenever one is confronted with doubts about his or her salvation, one can respond by saying, "I have been baptized." In this confession, one is basing the certainty of one's salvation upon the finished work of Christ. Baptism, in and of itself, has not efficacy apart from faith in Jesus.

In the heart of baptism is the Gospel of God. In baptism, one sees the richness of one's Christian heritage. As one is plunged beneath the waters of baptism, one is reminded that the emphasis is upon God's actions, not the actions of men and women. In other words, one is reminded that salvation is by grace through faith, not works (**Titus 3:4-7**). There is a sense in which baptism marks the beginning of the Christian life. Baptism must not become an empty sign. Baptism is not magic. When one is baptized, one gives his or her pledge of obedience to a new life (**Romans 6:1-23**).

Baptism is a sign of the finished work of Christ upon Calvary for the redemption of humanity. Again, one can say that baptism is a sign and seal of God's grace. In the watery grave of baptism, one is reminded that the Cross of Jesus is a condemnation of the values

of the world. In Christian baptism, one confesses that justification is by faith alone, which is the heart and substance of the Good News of God (**Galatians 3:6-14**). Salvation is the initiative of the sovereign love of God (**Ephesians 1:4**). Baptism is the awakening of the hearts of men and women to the self-giving action of God and, at the same time, one's response to God's Way of salvation by grace through faith. There is a sense in which one could say, "baptism establishes a relationship between the human and the divine." Baptism suggests a clean break with the past (**Romans 6:1-8; Colossians 3:1-17**). When one accepts the water-baptism of Christ, one expresses the devotion of his or her heart to Christ. Baptism is the outward sign of one's surrender to Jesus as Lord, which is a necessary part of one's conversion. Yes, in baptism, one acknowledges that God's Way is right.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the scenic root of witnessing to the lost world and to the church through three avenues—preaching, living, and baptism. The messenger of God's salvation must talk to men and women on the other side of the world, but, at the same time, the proclaimers of God's Gospel must not forget the man or woman on the other side of the room. Whenever one understands the supreme cost of redemption upon the Cross, one will become a missionary to everyone he or she knows. If the Christian community fails to reach out to the lost, the church becomes irrelevant by indifference to its mission—preaching Jesus. One objective in coming together as a collective fellowship is to listen to the Word, which opens the mind and heart to the message of grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The church has been chosen by God as the vehicle of His revelation of justification by faith in and through His Son.

The church must continue to preach Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity. The church of Jesus must continue to uphold that the atonement did not take place through Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Mohammed, but in and through Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). The Atonement took place in Him and through His name alone. The primary focus of the Christian community is the proclamation of the Good News about God's Way of salvation. As a witnessing church, the company of Resurrection must continue to discharge the function of proclaiming the Good News of God's Plan of salvation in and through Jesus. The church must bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. If one expects to receive God's mercy, this mercy can only be found at the place of horror—the Cross of Jesus. The church proclaims Jesus Christ as the heart of the Gospel because in His Person, Jesus unites the human and the divine natures.

As one turns to the second avenue of witnessing, one ought to focus attention upon his or her life as members of the Body of Christ. Christianity is a business not only for Sundays, but for weekdays as well. If one wishes to bear testimony to the Gospel of God, there must not be a discrepancy between one's belief and practice. Jesus speaks of testimony to the world through loving one another: "**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35)**". When one surrenders his or her life to Christ, one is in the army of Christ. In the sacrifice of Christ, one recognizes that God has rights over him or her. In other words, individuals are now the personal property of God. Since men and women are the personal property of God, both men and women must conduct themselves morally in order to honor God. Jesus, in

this same vein, says:

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)).

The third avenue of witnessing to the world is through baptism. In baptism, one witnesses to the world that God’s grace is enacted in this action on the part of the believer. Baptism calls forth a consciousness of God’s grace afresh. In the act of baptism, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is made visible. Baptism as a symbol helps one to apprehend the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. When one goes down into the water, one observes an opening for His grace. In baptism, one witnesses to the church as well as to the world that he or she exercises one’s dependence on the Unseen.

Baptism establishes a relation between the human and the divine; one shares in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism represents an awakening and response of the soul to God. In this action of baptism, one witnesses God’s self-giving action and one’s response to God’s love. Baptism witnesses the revealing action of God, and, at the same time, one witnesses God at work—seeking and finding. Baptism is a response of the creature to the Divine action of God on the Cross. In baptism one surrenders his former way of life and dedicates the rest of his or her life to God. In baptism, God allows every individual to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Is it any wonder that remission of sins is associated with baptism ([Acts 2:38; 22:16](#)).

^[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

a Or *from my mother’s womb*

d Hab. 2:4

e Lev. 18:5

f Deut. 21:23

a Or *you at the first*

a Or *be a sin offering*

f Or *his only begotten Son*

a Or *The LORD our God is one LORD; or The LORD is our God, the LORD is one; or The LORD is our God, the LORD alone*

a Or *hold on to*

a Some manuscripts *our*

b Some early manuscripts *coming on those who are disobedient*

a Or *and not we ourselves*

a Gen. 15:6

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18